



Political bureau of the Atlantic Arc Commission

2 March 2017 - Les Sables d'Olonne (Pays de la Loire-Fr)

Minutes of the meeting

After excusing the absence of President Retailleau for the morning, **Sébastien Pilard**, Delegate of the President of the Atlantic Arc Commission, welcomed the participants and introduced the agenda and procedure for the meeting.

REPORT OF ACTIVITIES OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION

Pauline Caumont, Executive Secretary of the Atlantic Arc Commission, thanked all the participants and gave a brief presentation of the [report of activities of the Atlantic Arc Commission](#) since the last General Assembly on 2 and 3 June 2016. **Pauline Caumont** stressed the importance of political mobilisation and thanked the Pays de la Loire region for its strong involvement in favour of the Atlantic Arc Commission. This enabled the more technical background work to be highlighted during the Retailleau-Vella meeting of 7 December 2016 in Brussels.

Pauline Caumont then outlined the various technical meetings held this year, and the activities related to European projects, especially the project on Blue Careers, "*A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career*" (BBMBC).

Sébastien Pilard in turn applauded the work of the Secretariat of the Atlantic Arc Commission and the member Regions. This work helps to support our Commission's reputation with European institutions, especially regarding maritime policy issues.

Jesús Gamallo Aller, for the Xunta de Galicia, thanked the Presidency of the Pays de la Loire and the secretariat for their work. He emphasised both the technical and political aspects of our work, expressed through major events, technical meetings and numerous projects. This strong political profitability for the Regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission pushes us to set the bar even higher.

Mikel Anton, for the Basque Government, supported the view of Galicia and commended the ability of the Atlantic Arc Commission to present such good projects. He believes that the good ratio between projects submitted and approved is a strong indicator of the quality of the work of the Atlantic Arc Commission. Participation in European projects is a financial asset for the Atlantic Arc Commission, but also plays a technical part in terms of expertise and sharing of experience.

Juan José Sota, for the Government of Cantabria, in turn thanked the Pays de la Loire for their welcome and echoed the comments of his colleagues. He stressed that the actions of the Atlantic Arc Commission can change the global view that citizens have of the EU bureaucracy, which is why it is important to continue working to break down existing stereotypes. All the actions of the Atlantic Arc Commission have a part to play in a more balanced development of our territories and the sound progress of the European project.

Michael O'Brien, for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly, reiterated, in the context of Brexit, the crucial role to be played by the Atlantic Arc Commission for the cohesion of the Atlantic area. The Interreg programme is a cornerstone of the continuation of the works. The quality of the documents presented by the Atlantic Arc Commission, the statistics and the figures put forward are also very positive for the Member Regions.

Pauline Caumont thanked the members of the Political Bureau for the positive feedback. She explained that the Atlantic Arc Commission has positioned itself for a consolidation of the Interreg programme and a better allocation of transnational cooperation programmes in general. This responds to macro-regional and sea basin strategies.

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After excusing the absence of the political representative for the Brittany Region, **Claire Le Tertre** spoke about the issue of projects. She of course reiterated the importance of these projects from a budgetary point of view, but also from a more geographical perspective. Brexit could call into question the territorial zoning of the future Atlantic Area Programme post 2020, a point on which the Atlantic Arc Commission needs to position itself.

THE BUDGETARY OUTLOOK OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION

Pauline Caumont presented the budgetary outlook of the Atlantic Arc Commission. She started by explaining that there will be no increase in membership dues this year and highlighted the additional financial contribution from the Pays de la Loire Region. She recalled that the reference budget remains that of the CPMR into which all the geographical commissions' accounts are integrated. **Pauline Caumont** detailed the various budget items. The general income is increasing, with a lower than expected deficit which is supported by the CPMR. **Pauline Caumont** also presented the different projects that have moved into the 2nd phase of the Interreg Atlantic Area Programme call for projects. Final results are expected in early May 2017.

REVISION OF THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE ATLANTIC ARC COMMISSION

Pauline Caumont presented the [memo on the revision of the working groups](#). She recalled how the various working groups operate and especially the numerous meetings that take place within this framework. For better time management, she explained the choice to have two main divisions:

- A "Maritime" division bringing together the "Fisheries and aquaculture", "Marine renewable energies" and "Innovation" groups;
- An "Accessibility and attractiveness" division, with the "Transport" and "Atlantic Tourism and Culture" groups.

The two technical divisions would only meet twice a year for better mobilisation and better time management. This structure would be based on the political dimension of the Atlantic Arc Commission (Presidency, Political Bureau and Secretariat). Beyond these specific meetings, the "Atlantic Strategy" group will be able to maintain the frequent link (every 2 months) between the Regions.

Sébastien Pilard approved the reorganisation and underlined the relevance of these two divisions for a clarification of the work and improved participation of the elected representatives. This new organisation should be able to address cross-cutting issues much more easily.

Jesús Gamallo Aller gave his support to this new structure, more flexible and more realistic regarding the opportunities for participation of our Regions in terms of finance and time.

Laurence Harribey, for the New Aquitaine Region, also said she agreed with this new pragmatic organisation. She emphasised the notion of cross-cutting issues. The New Aquitaine Region welcomed this new organisation for better political positioning.

Michael O'Brien approved this proposal. The Northern & Western Regional Assembly does have a small team for the issues of European cooperation. This organisation should allow greater participation of his Region in the work of the Atlantic Arc Commission.

Juan José Sota is also in favour of this restructuring because of the obvious cross-cutting nature of many areas of work. This simplification could also enable more meetings to be organised in the territories, in closer proximity to its citizens.

Christophe Priou stressed the importance of cross-cutting issues in the maritime field, and supported the new organisation. He spoke about the notion of maritime safety which could be integrated, as well as issues of safety at sea.

To conclude, **Pauline Caumont** thanked the Regions for their positive feedback and proposed that 2017 be a year of transition. Elections for the coordination of each working group will be organised in 2018. With Brittany having expressed its desire to leave the presidency of the "Marine renewable energies" group, the Basque Government put itself forward as *Acting* Chair until 2018. This proposal was validated. The Annual General Meeting in 2018 will provide an opportunity to assess this new format.

CONSEQUENCES OF “BREXIT” FOR THE ATLANTIC ARC REGIONS

Pauline Caumont presented the memo on [The consequences of Brexit for the Atlantic Arc Regions](#). She explained the consequences, in particular financial and budgetary for the EU budget, and the impact on certain key policies for the Atlantic Commission, for example the maritime policy or the policy of cohesion and cooperation. Brexit marks the start of a major period of uncertainty for the Atlantic territories. The memo included shared messages on key issues for the Atlantic Arc Commission: cohesion, territorial cooperation, maritime affairs, transport, etc.

Sébastien Pilard added that it is necessary for the Atlantic Arc Commission to consider all prospects for partnership with the United Kingdom, especially on maritime issues.

Mikel Anton, from the Basque Government, pointed out that a pragmatic approach is needed to identify the best possible solutions for both parties.

Jesús Gamallo Aller congratulated the Secretariat for the preparation of this memo. Although he is disappointed about the vote of the British citizens for Brexit, he announced that the Spanish Regions are also preparing a document on this subject within the scope of the Committee of the Regions. Because of the importance of this issue for the regions of the Atlantic Arc Commission, he proposed the creation of a **Task Force** within the Atlantic Arc Commission to provide feedback to our respective national governments. He proposed that the Galicia Region coordinate this Task Force.

Martin Harley, for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly, in turn spoke about the case of Ireland in the context of Brexit, especially border issues. He explained the many uncertainties that exist regarding transport, education and training for Irish students, issues relating to health cover, tourism, etc. He concluded by giving his support to the creation of a Task Force within the Atlantic Arc Commission to find common answers to all these issues.

Michael O’Brien supported his colleague and explained that very concrete issues are going to arise, for example in the everyday agricultural trade that takes place between Ireland and the UK.

Juan José Sota spoke about his concern for the future of the EU. He recalled that Spain also has a border with the United Kingdom, with Gibraltar. He hopes that the UK make efforts to meet the financial commitments it undertook until 2020. He insisted on the conditions being such that Member States have more benefit being in the EU than the reverse.

Christophe Priou moved towards identifying the problems that exist in our Regions in the context of Brexit, to find quick and effective solutions. He referred to the work of the Economic and Social Council of the Brittany Regions on the impact of Brexit in the Region

In conclusion, **Sébastien Pilard** validated the proposal to establish a Brexit Task Force. The work will be undertaken within the “Atlantic Strategy” group. He stressed the opportunity that has been given to us to show that Europe does not just pose problems for citizens, but can also provide answers and solutions, especially through the Regions.

THE CPMR AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

Pauline Caumont presented the memo on [The CPMR and the future of Europe](#). This is a technical analysis focused on the working themes of the CPMR: maritime, accessibility and cohesion. The objective is to prepare a CPMR political manifesto for 2018 which will be based on technical considerations. To do this, an expert group will be set up within the CPMR to feed in thoughts on this subject. The Regions of the Atlantic Arc that are interested in joining this initiative are invited to make themselves known to the Secretariat of the Atlantic Arc Commission.

FINAL DECLARATION - LES SABLES D’OLONNE 2017

Pauline Caumont presented the draft of the Final Declaration of the Atlantic Arc Commission “Les Sables d’Olonne 2017” and the main themes selected. She recalled that all working groups have contributed to the development of this text, as well as the Coordinating Committee which met beforehand.

The discussion focused on the amendments presented by the Region of Asturias, Cantabria and New Aquitaine as well as on the proposal of Galicia to create a Brexit Task Force.

After discussion, the Political Bureau approved the final version of the [“Sables d’Olonne 2017 declaration”](#) which should be approved by the General Meeting.

Sébastien Pilard closed this meeting of the Bureau of the Atlantic Arc Commission by thanking the Regions and the secretariat for their investment as well as their contribution to the reputation of the work of the Atlantic Arc Commission.